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ABSTRACT

Data collected as part of a larger survey that focused on the 1978 gubernatorial race in New York State were used in a study of political advertising and media credibility. Specifically, the study examined the factors that influence an individual's rating of the helpfulness of political advertising and related these factors to voting patterns. A telephone survey of 708 adults elicited information about their interest in the campaign, personal views on several political issues, media use, candidate preference, and political advertising, as well as demographic information. Among the findings were the following: people with less education tended to select television as the most credible medium; those who read newspapers regularly were slightly more likely to select newspapers as having the most credible political advertising; and more women than men found political advertising helpful. A positive relationship was found to exist between the medium selected as most credible and the types of reasons for selecting one's candidate: more people who selected newspapers as most credible for political advertising tended to cite issue-related reasons while those who selected television tended to give job-performance reasons. (Author/FL)

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SOME CORRELATES OF MEDIA POLITICAL ADVERTISING CREDIBILITY

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The question of which medium is most credible for news has been a much discussed and debated one.[1] The question of which medium is most credible for advertising, however,has been given comparatively short shrift. While some research does exist, it remains unclear whether the single medium is considered most credible for all types of advertising or whether one must make certain distinctions between different types of advertising.[2]

A similar problem was illustrated concerning analyses of news media credibility when critics of the Roper studies[3] argued that finer distinctions had to be made with regard to the type of news observed i.e., whether one was referring to local or national and international news.[4] It was justifiably argued that people make distinctions between media for various types of news.

Studies done on media advertising credibility typically have tried to relate demographics and perceived advertising credibility for obvious reasons--a number of these were market analysis surveys.[5] A study by Becker, Martino and Towers based on secondary analysis of data obtained from three different-size communities, provided more insight into this subject when the authors explored the relationship between media use and perceived credibility of its advertising.[6]

This study explored the more specific area of political advertising and media credibility. This study also looked at the factors that influence how an individual rates the helpfulness of political advertising. Finally, this research attempted to relate these factors to how people vote.

Rationale. It has long been accepted that television has become

the major source of news for most Americans, and the most credible source of news as well.[7] This appears to be true regardless of origin or place of event, although the dominance of television as most credible on the local level is not as clear-cut.[8] In addition, researchers have found that perceptions of source credibility are positively related to media use. Those persons most dependent on newspapers as a source of information are more likely to find this medium most believable.[9]

Becker, et. al. decided to test this proposition in the field of advertising by raising the question: Is media use also related to perceived advertising credibility? Demographic correlates of medium choice for advertising credibility were also investigated.[10]

Their findings differed from research on media credibility for news. They found that most respondents prefer newspapers as the most credible source for advertising. Preference for newspapers as the most credible advertising source was also found to be positively related to age and media use for local news. They found the strongest relationship between media use and advertising credibility among older respondents. Sex and education were found to correlate only in the small community studied.[11]

In the area of political advertising, are newspapers also considered most credible and would the same demographic and media use factors that operate for advertising in general also work here? This was the first research question addressed by this study.

A second area of interest in this study was the respondents' perceived helpfulness of political advertising. It was assumed that within the group of people who select a medium as carrying the most

credible advertising, there would be variations in the degree of perceived helpfulness of political advertising. Our second research question therefore was: What kinds of people perceive political advertising to be helpful and what kinds of people see political advertising as not helpful?

In this connection, campaign expert Joseph Napolitan has argued that the most interesting campaigns to analyze are those for U.S. senator and governor. The extremely heavy volume of news coverage associated with presidential campaigns often is missing from senatorial or gubernatorial campaigns. Thus, candidates are much more dependent on advertising in the mass media, particularly television, to get their message across.[12] If the kinds of voters who find political advertising helpful are not quite the kinds of voters candidates are most interested in reaching, this could have serious implications for the candidates.

Finally, we were interested in the effect of medium choice for political advertising credibility and perceived helpfulness of political advertising in relation to how voters choose candidates.

On a broader scale, the effectiveness of political advertising has been demonstrated in a number of studies. Bowers demonstrated that a candidate's issue agenda could be "transferred" to a voter through political advertising. His study on agenda-setting in political advertising also showed that voters could acquire affect about candidates through political ads.[13]

Patterson and McClure went a step farther and suggested that political advertising was even more effective than news, particularly for the low interest voter.[14]

Rothschild and Ray used an experiment to demonstrate how political ads might affect voting intent in a low involvement race. They found that political advertising can have a positive effect on intent.[15]

This study differs from previous studies on political advertising in two respects: first, it does not focus soley or even primarily on political advertising on television. Second, the independent variables used here--medium considered most credible for political advertising and perceived helpfulness--and their relationship to the reasons for a voter's candidate choice have not been examined before.

Method

Data for this study were collected as part of a larger survey conducted in the fall of 1978 focusing on the New York gubernatorial race. The survey, done by telephone, was conducted from the city of Syracuse, a diversified community of about 220,000 persons located in upstate New York.

Students in an undergraduate reporting class at Syracuse University and a graduate research class were trained as interviewers. Between October 10 and 17, interviewers surveyed 708 residents of Onondaga County of which Syracuse is the county seat.

Respondents' names had been randomly drawn from the Greater Syracuse telephone directory[16] and interviewers were instructed to ask for Mr. or Ms. (name in phonebook), depending on a predesignated arrangement to guarantee proportionate representation of males and females.

The survey contained 31 questions generally related to the

gubernatorial race between incumbent High Carey and challenger Perry Duryea. The questionnaire covered such areas as interest in the race, the respondents' views on a number of political issues, media use, candidate preference and reasons for their choice, and three questions specifically on political advertising. Demographic questions on occupation, age, education and sex were also asked.

Results

The question used to determine medium choice for most credible advertising was the following:

> Now I'd like to ask you a few questions on candidates' political advertisements. Some political advertising seems believable, while other political advertising seems hard to believe. In this area, considering radio, newspapers, television, and magazines, which one is likely to carry the most believable political advertising?[17]

The choices presented to the respondent were: radio, newspapers, TV, magazines, no difference, and don't know.

The following was the breakdown by medium: 3.4 per cent (n=24) picked radio, 23.7 per cent (n=165) said newspapers, 23.8 per cent selected television (n=166), 6.0 per cent picked magazines (n=24), 27.3 said there was no difference (n=190), and 15.8 per cent answered 'don't know' (n=110).

Because of the small numbers who picked magazines and radio, much of the analysis will center on those who selected the other media.

Medium choice for political advertising credibility was related to sex, education and age. The results, presented in Table 1, were analyzed after those who responded 'don't know' were excluded. Results showed that only education had a significant relationship

with medium choice. Compared with respondents with a college degree, twice as many with less than a high school education picked TV as most credible for political advertising. As education increased, the number of people who said there was no difference between the media increased.

Slightly more women than men selected TV as most credible but differences were not significant. Age also was not a factor in medium choice.

Table 1 About Here

Table 2 shows credibility by frequency of newspaper and TV use. While relationships are significant, correlation coefficients are quite low, indicating a negligible relationship. Those who read newspapers regularly are only slightly more likely to pick newspapers as a believable source for political advertising than those who watch TV regularly.

Table 2 About Here

Respondents were also asked to name their primary source of information on the governor's race. Responses to this question were cross-tabulated with perceived medium credibility, and results from Table 3 again showed a slight but significant relationship. Those who selected newspapers as their primary information source on the governor's race were more likely than those who picked other media to select newspapers as the most credible medium. Those who said TV was their primary information source on the governor's race were more likely to pick TV as most credible.

Table 3 About Here

Data on perceived helpfulness of political advertising were obtained through the following question:

> How helpful would you say political advertising by the candidates for governor has been in helping you decide who to vote for? Would you say the political advertising has been very helpful, somewhat helpful or not at all helpful?

Data for respondents who responded 'very helpful' and 'somewhat helpful' were combined and the results, by sex, age, and education are presented in Table 4. The results showed a relationship with sex and education but not with age. As education increased, the number who indicated political advertising was not helpful also increased. More women than men found political advertising to be helpful.

Table 4 About Here

Perceived helpfulness of advertising was also correlated with indecision about candidate choice. It seemed reasonable to expect that those who had not made up their minds on a gubernatorial candidate might find political advertising more helpful than those who had already made their choice. The results from Table 5 show that this was not the case. Just as many people who had made up their minds found political advertising helpful as people who were undecided.

Table 5 About Here

Perceived helpfulness was correlated with medium selected as most credible for political advertising to determine if perceived helpfulness varied by choice of medium. Table 6 shows that this appears to be the case. However, the most striking difference is not among media; for example, there appears to be little difference between those who selected newspapers and television as most credible.

The most striking difference is between those who selected one of these media and those who said there was no difference between media. Close to two-thirds in the latter group found political advertising not at all helpful.

Table 6 About Here

When political interest was controlled for, the relationship between perceived helpfulness and medium choice for political advertising credibility was maintained between those who said there were no differences between media and those who selected a medium. However, interesting differences emerge between those who select newspapers and those who select TV as most credible source. Among those who picked television as most credible source, the percentage who find political advertising not at all helpful increases from 17 to 41 percent, as interest in the election decreases. As the correlation coefficients show, the relationship between perceived helpfulness and credibility is most pronounced among those who are least interested in the election.

Table 7 About Here

Finally, medium choice for most credible political advertising and perceived helpfulness were correlated with types of reasons respondents gave for their candidate choice. The question used to determine the latter was an open-ended one:

> Can you tell me anything about your choice for governor that makes you want to vote for him?

Reasons were categorized according to whether they were related to issue ("his stand on capital punishment"), related to personality ("his honesty"), related to job performance ("he's an efficient

administrator--he has streamlined the bureaucracy"), related to his political party ("he's a democrat"), or non-specific. The last category was included for responses such as "I like him," "he's the better of two evils," or "I can't stand his opponent)".

The greatest number of responses by far were in that nonspecific category. (See Table 8) Among those who cite personality as the reason for their candidate choice, about the same number of people chose newspapers or television or made no choice as to which medium was not credible. Among those who cite issue-related reasons, more people picked newspapers as most credible than any other medium. On the other hand, for those who cite job-performance reasons, more people choose television than newspapers as most credible. There is no difference between newspapers and television as a medium choice among those who give nonspecific reasons for their candidate preference. However, more than half of those who said there was no difference between media cited nonspecific reasons for their vote choice, about 13 per cent more than those who selected newspapers or television.

Table 8 About Here

When type of reason for candidate choice was cross-tabulated by perceived helpfulness of advertising, no significant relationship was found.

Table 9 About Here

Discussion

The following is a summary of results from this study:

1. Choice of medium as most credible for political advertising

relates significantly to peoples level of education but not to their sex or age. People with less education tended to select television as most credible; as education increased, the number who said there was no difference between media increased.

2. Media use related significantly to medium choice. Those who read newspapers regularly were also slightly more likely to select newspapers as having the most credible political advertising.

3. Similarly, credibility was also significantly related to information source on the governor's race, i.e., those who said newspapers were their primary source of information were also likely to say it had the most credible ads.

4. More women found political advertising helpful than men; as education increased, those who considered political advertising helpful decreased. Age did not seem to affect perceived helpfulness.

5. Indecision about the race did not relate significantly to helpfulness of political advertising.

6. More people who felt there was no difference among media in perceived credibility said political advertising was not helpful than those who selected one of the media. Just as many who selected newspapers as carrying the most credible advertising said they found advertising helpful as those who picked television.

7. When political interest was taken into account, there was a difference between those who picked newspapers and those who picked television as most credible source. Among those who picked TV as most credible, the number of those who considered political advertising not at all helpful increased as political interest decreased.

The opposite was true for newspapers. Among those slightly interested in the elections, the difference between those who considered newspapers most credible and those who found TV most credible was most pronounced among those respondents who felt political advertising was very helpful. Twice as many among those who found political advertising very helpful and who were slightly interested in the elections tended to select TV as most credible source for political advertising. The number who felt political advertising was not at all helpful and who said there was no difference among media in political advertising credibility increased as interest in the elections decreased.

8. There is a relationship between medium selected as most credible and the types of reasons for selecting one's candidate. People who selected newspapers as most credible for political advertising more often cited issue-related reasons. Job-performance reasons were given by more people who selected television as most credible. Among those who saw no difference between media, more than half gave nonspecific reasons for their candidate choice.

9. There was no relationship found between perceived helpfulness and types of reasons cited for candidate choice.

What do the data tell us? First of all, the speculation that there may be a difference between a person's choice of medium for having the most credible general advertising and choice of medium for having the most credible political advertising appears to be warranted. In the Becker et. al. study cited earlier,[17] newspapers were the clearcut choice as the medium carrying the most credible advertising. This was not true for political advertising where

in particular, there appears to be little difference between newspapers and television. The difference is between those who choose either newspapers or television and those who say there is no difference among media. It might be argued that it is difficult to interpret the "no difference" selection as it could mean both television and newspapers are just as credible or it could indicate the opposite. It appears the latter is more plausible because more people who say there is no difference also say political advertising is not at all helpful.

The fact that no significant relationship was found between indecision and helpfulness of advertising may not be too surprising when one considers that political ads are just one of a number of sources of information on the governor's race.

Education appears to predict medium credibility choice for political advertising more consistently than it does for advertising in general. Again, this is not too surprising. One could argue that the voting decision might be considered a weightier one, especially among the politically active and interested, than the decision about which brand of toothpaste to buy. Furthermore, education has been shown to be consistently related to media use and this relationship appears to be mediated by one's civic attitudes.[18]

One of the more interesting findings from this study was the fact that as political interest decreased, the number of people who consider political advertising helpful also decreased. How does one reconcile these findings with Patterson and McClure's finding that the impact particularly of televised political advertising is

greatest among the least interested? Possibly because this is the group that exerts the least effort in learning about the election, the candidates, or the issues, much of advertising's effect on them is what Krugman calls "incidental." With constant repetition, these political advertising messages gradually sink into the consciousness of the largely disinterested group of voters, without these people consciously seeking out these messages.[19]

The impact of medium selected for credibility appears also in terms of the types of reasons given for their candidate choice. The job performance orientation of those who selected TV as most credible is interesting, particularly in light of the fact that both candidates in their television advertising campaigns apparently emphasized the same area.[20]

These results have to be read with caution because they may be unique to this particular gubernatorial campaign, a campaign which generated more than average interest because of the closeness of the race and public interest in two or three major issues over which the two candidates clearly differed.

The correlates of media political advertising credibility and perceived helpfulness are all slight, despite statistical significance. It could very well be that these variables' effects are cumulative and no one variable is capable of explaining or accounting for medium choice for political advertising credibility or perceived helpfulness of political ads.

This study might suggest to political advertisers that in similar races, such areas as issues might be emphasized in newspaper ads

while different areas - such as job performance - might be given more emphasis in television ads.

Further research might replicate this study on other election levels (Presidential or mayoral), under varying conditions of closeness of the race. A direct comparison might also be made between medium choice for general advertising and that for political advertising.

Footnotes

1. For a comprehensive review of research in this area, see Bradley S. Greenberg and Michael Roloff, "Mass Media Credibility: Research Results and Critical Issue," ANPA News Research Bulletin, No. 6 (November, 1974).

2. Lee Becker, Raymond Martino and Wayne M. Towers, "Media Advertising Credibility," Journalism Quarterly, 53, Summer 1976, pp. 216-22.

3. Roper Organization, Trends in Public Attitudes Toward Television and Other Mass Media, 1959-1974 (New York: Television Information Office, 1975).

4. Greenberg and Roloff, op. cit. See also John Abel and M.O. Wirth, "Newspapers vs. TV Credibility for Local News," Journalism Quarterly, 54, Summer 1977, pp. 371-75; Guido Stempel, "Effects in Performance of a Cross-Media Monopoly," Journalism Monographs, No.29 (June, 1973).

5. Newspaper Advertising Bureau Inc., "When People Want to Know... Where do They Go to Find Out?" (New York, 1976); Newspaper Advertising Bureau, Inc., "Shoppers on the Move," (New York, 1975); Rena Bartos, "The Consumer View of Advertising - 1974," paper presented to the American Association of Advertising Agencies, Dorado, Puerto Rico (1975).

6. Becker, et. al., op. cit.

7. Roper Organization, op. cit.; Richard F. Carter and Bradley Greenberg, "Newspapers or Television: Which do you Believe?" Journalism Quarterly, 42, Winter, 1965, pp.28-34.

8. Greenberg and Roloff, op. cit.

9. Carter and Greenberg, op. cit.

10. Becker et. al., op. cit.

11. The Becker study was based on summary analysis of data from 15 community newspaper studies.

12. Joseph Napolitan, "Media Costs and Effects in Political Campaigns," Annals 427:114-24, Sept., 1976.

13. Thomas A. Bowers, "Candidate Advertising: The Agenda is the Message," in The Emergence of American Political Issues, Don Shaw and Maxwell E. McCombs, Eds. (New York:West Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 53-67.

14. Thomas E. Patterson and Robert D. McClure, The Unseeing Eye (New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1976); R.D. McClure and T.E. Patterson, "Television News and Political Advertising: The Impact of Exposure on Voter Beliefs," Comm Research, 1:1, January, 1974, pp.3-31.

Footnotes (cont.)

15. Michael L. Rothschild and M.L. Ray, "Involvement and Political Advertising Effects," Comm Research, 1:3, July, 1974, pp. 264-83.

16. The Greater Syracuse area consists of all of Onondaga County plus a few other towns in neighboring counties. The latter was excluded from the population sampled.

17. Becker, Martino and Towers, op. cit.

18. Patterson and McClure, op. cit.

19. Time, October 28, 1978.

Table 1

MOST CREDIBLE POLITICAL ADVERTISING SOURCE,
BY EDUCATION, SEX, AND AGE

Medium	Education			
	Less than High School	Finished H.S.	Some College	College Grad +
Radio	7.4	3.5	4.9	3.0
Newspapers	25.0	34.9	23.8	26.7
TV	41.2	27.9	27.3	23.8
Magazines	7.4	5.2	11.9	5.4
No Difference	19.1	28.5	32.2	41.1
	100.1 (n=68)	100.0 (n=172)	100.1 (n=143)	100.0 (n=202)

$X^2 = 27.76$, df=12, $p < .01$

Medium	Sex	
	Male	Female
Radio	4.1	4.2
Newspapers	29.2	27.3
TV	26.6	29.5
Magazines	5.5	8.4
No Difference	34.7	30.6
	100.1 (n=271)	100.0 (n=308)

n.s.

Table 1.....

Medium	Age				
	18-25	25-35	36-50	51-65	66+
Radio	6.6	3.3	2.6	3.4	9.1
Newspapers	27.6	29.5	28.4	26.9	25.5
TV	30.3	28.4	26.5	28.6	27.3
Magazines	11.8	7.1	7.1	5.9	3.6
No Difference	23.7	31.7	35.5	35.3	34.5
	100.0 (n=76)	100.0 (n=183)	100.1 (n=155)	100.1 (n=119)	100.0 (n=55)

Table 2

MEDIUM CHOICE FOR POLITICAL ADVERTISING CREDIBILITY, BY MEDIA USE

A. Newspapers:

Medium Choice	Frequency of Reading		
	Never or Seldom	Sometimes	Daily
Radio	1.8	4.6	4.3
Newspapers	17.5	30.6	28.9
Television	33.3	28.7	27.3
Magazines	12.3	13.0	5.0
No Diff.	35.1	23.1	34.6
	100.0 (n=57)	100.0 (n=108)	100.0 (n=422)

$X^2 = 17.71$, df, 8, $p = .02$

B. Local TV:

Medium Choice	Frequency of Viewing		
	Seldom or Never	Sometimes	Daily
Radio	5.6	2.1	4.4
Newspapers	25.4	33.6	26.8
Television	18.3	26.4	32.5
Magazines	11.9	5.0	6.3
No Diff.	38.9	32.9	30.0
	100.0 (n=126)	100.0 (n=140)	100.0 (n=317)

$X^2 = 18.09$, df, 8, $p = .02$

Table 3

CREDIBILITY OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING SOURCE BY INFORMATION SOURCE ON GOVERNOR'S RACE

Media	Radio	Newspapers	TV	Magazines
Radio	13.8	2.5	4.5	0.0
Newspapers	27.6	32.9	23.7	19.0
TV	10.3	21.4	39.7	28.6
Magazines	17.2	4.6	7.1	28.6
No Diff.	31.0	38.6	25.0	23.8
	(29)	(280)	(224)	(21)

$X^2 = 60.00$ df,12 $p = .0000$

$\lambda = .11$

Table 4

PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING,
BY SEX, AGE AND EDUCATION

Perceived Helpfulness	Age				
	18-25	26-35	36-50	51-65	65+
Helpful	60.2	57.7	48.2	55.0	59.7
Not Helpful	39.8	42.3	51.8	45.0	40.3
	100.0 (n=83)	100.0 (n=196)	100.0 (n=195)	100.0 (n=151)	100.0 (n=72)

$x^2 = 5.76$, df, 4 (n.s.)

Perceived Helpfulness	Education			
	Less than High School	High School Grad	Some College	College Grad +
Helpful	69.0	58.8	55.4	45.3
Not Helpful	31.0	41.2	44.6	54.7
	100.0 (n=87)	100.0 (n=204)	100.0 (n=166)	100.0 (n=236)

$x^2 = 16.93$, df, 3 $p < .001$ $Q = .23$

Perceived Helpfulness	Sex	
	Male	Female
Helpful	48.8	59.6
Not Helpful	51.2	40.4
	100.0 (n=303)	100.0 (n=386)

$x^2 = 9.95$ df, 3, $p < .05$ $Q = .21$

Table 5

PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING, BY DECISION MADE

Perceived Helpfulness	Decision	
	Candidate Selected	Undecided
Helpful	54.7	53.6
Not Helpful	45.3	46.4
	100.0 (n=534)	100.0 (n=153)

$X^2 = .02$, df, 1 (n.s.)

Table 6

MEDIUM CHOICE FOR POLITICAL ADVERTISING CREDIBILITY, BY PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS

Perceived Helpfulness	Most Credible Medium for Pol. Advertising				
	Radio	Newspapers	Television	Magazines	No diff.
Very helpful	12.5	12.2	17.2	4.8	4.2
Somewhat helpful	58.3	52.4	46.0	40.5	33.0
Not at all helpful	29.2	35.4	36.8	54.8	62.8
	100.0 (n=24)	100.0 (n=164)	100.0 (n=163)	100.0 (n=42)	100.0 (n=191)

X^2 = 53.45, df, 8 p = .000 Gamma = .21

Table 7

CREDIBILITY OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING SOURCE AND PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING ON VOTING, BY INTEREST IN THE GOVERNOR'S RACE

Most Credible Medium for Political Advertising	Political Interest								
	Interested			Slightly Interested			Not at all Interested		
	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not at all Helpful	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not at all Helpful	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Not at all Helpful
Radio	0.0	5.2	2.0	13.0	5.3	4.7	0.0	8.0	0.0
Newspapers	41.2	31.9	25.2	17.4	35.1	18.8	50.0	40.0	13.9
TV	41.2	28.9	17.0	52.2	25.5	23.5	50.0	44.0	41.7
Magazines	2.9	6.7	8.2	4.3	8.5	11.8	0.0	0.0	2.8
No Difference	14.7	27.4	47.6	13.0	25.5	41.2	0.0	8.0	41.7
	(N=34)	(N=135)	(N=147)	(N=23)	(N=94)	(N=85)	(N=4)	(N=25)	(N=36)
	X^2 = 28.20, df=8, p=.000 gamma = .30			X^2 = 20.58, df=8, p=.008 gamma = .28			X^2 = 16.35, df=8, p=.037 gamma = .70		

Table 8

REASONS FOR CANDIDATE CHOICE, BY MEDIUM CHOICE FOR POLITICAL ADVERTISING CREDIBILITY

Types of Reasons for Candidate Choice	Medium Most Credible for Political Advertising				
	Radio	Newspaper	TV	Magazine	No Difference
Issue Stand	20.0	25.5	17.9	10.5	15.7
Personality	6.7	6.9	6.3	15.8	7.4
Job Performance	0.0	14.7	21.4	21.0	19.0
Party	13.3	10.8	12.5	5.3	2.5
Nonspecific	60.0	42.1	42.0	47.4	55.4
	100.0 (n=15)	100.0 (n=102)	100.0 (n=112)	100.0 (n=19)	100.0 (n=121)

$x^2 = 47.19$ df, 16 $p < .01$ $\lambda = .02$